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SHOULD LIBRARIES BE UNDER THE GENERAL CIVIL SERVICE OF THE STATE,
OR HAVE A SEPARATE CIVIL SERVICE ORGANIZATION?*

BY W. DAWSON JOHNSTON, *Librarian, St. Paul Public Library*

The form of this question indicates that the only alternative to control of libraries by the general civil service of the state is control by a separate civil service organization.

There is at present a state civil service commission in only ten out of forty-eight states, and in only one of these states (New Jersey) has the commission assumed responsibility for civil service conditions in libraries other than state libraries. In only one state, California, has an effort been made by state library authorities to provide for the certification of libraries. Under these conditions both civil service reformers and those most interested in libraries are bound to believe that much remains to be done in the direction of standardizing library service. The only question is who should do it, and how should it be done? The ordinary civil service commission does not realize that the librarian can be of assistance to him; the majority of library boards and librarians are similarly slow to seek the assistance of civil service authorities in the selection of the clerical and building staff of the library.

The attitude of indifference to those to be served on the part of civil service authorities is well illustrated in New Jersey, where despite the dissatisfaction of librarians with the civil service conditions, a state investigation committee appointed in 1916 made no recommendations whatever affecting libraries, either from ignorance of the feeling of librarians or from inability to discover ways and means of improving the state civil service.

The attitude of librarians toward civil service authorities, on the other hand, has been shown in Washington, where librarians secured exemption for libraries from

the civil service law; and in Ohio and Massachusetts, where they defeated efforts of the civil service authorities to extend their service to libraries.

That relations of a very different kind are not only desirable but possible is shown by the activity of the Wisconsin civil service commission, which, through its educational and welfare service, and in coöperation with the state library commission, recently provided for a series of six conferences of departmental librarians. The discussions were led by officers of the library commission who had visited the different state departments and noted conditions.

The possibility of more helpful relations is shown also in the history of the civil service reform movement itself, which has passed through a negative stage aimed at keeping undesirables out of the service, into a positive stage directed toward raising standards and promoting efficiency.

The latter movement was inaugurated in 1908 by the organization of the National Assembly of Civil Service Commissions.

An important and significant step forward in the work of this assembly was the appointment in 1915 of a committee on Coöperation among commissioners on examination standards, which committee, in 1916, suggested the assignment of not more than two examination subjects at most, to sub-committees or to various civil service commissions for special investigation and study, and recommended that the results be made available to all civil service commissions through a Topic committee on examination standards.

In view of the unhappy condition of a number of libraries under civil service control, the desire of progressive civil service authorities to improve the civil service, and the movement among librarians to standardize library service, is it not de-

*Abstract.

sirable that there should be agreement between civil service and library authorities with regard to the application of civil service principles to library administration, and particularly agreement upon the following questions?

(1) Should not civil service principles be applied to the selection of civil service officials, especially examiners, and if not, why not? Some of the opposition to the extension of civil service among libraries arises from the fact that some civil service commissioners are simply political appointees and some from the fact that general examiners are not only unable to give any but general examinations, but are sometimes unable even to recognize this limitation. If there are any reasons why civil service officials should be exempt from the rules governing other public officials they should be made known.

(2) Should not the service of different civil service commissions be coördinated and examinations standardized? There is much distrust of civil service administration due to the failure of civil authorities to agree among themselves as to the proper classification of the service and the proper standards of examination. This lack of mutual confidence among civil service authorities begets lack of confidence among those whom it is their desire to serve. There can be little hope of greater respect for the decisions of civil service officials until they have greater respect for their own decisions.

(3) Should not civil service commissions coöperate with other professional

bodies in the elevation and maintenance of professional standards? There may well be lack of confidence in the local civil service examiner on the part of the librarian or other expert, and the local examiner may in turn distrust the local librarian, but between state and national organizations representing civil service authorities on the one hand and library authorities on the other there should be coöperation, and, indeed, must be if substantial progress is to be made.

(4) Ought we not to recognize the impossibility of always securing the best candidates through formal examinations? The best that such an examination can do, even when personality and experience are carefully rated, is to eliminate the least capable; it must be left to the appointing officer to determine who of those certified is best fitted for a particular position.

I hope that the time will come when there may be agreement between the National Assembly of Civil Service Commissions and the American Library Association with regard to these and all other points in which civil service and library authorities have a common interest.

In the meantime we can only seek for the improvement of civil service conditions in those few states in which civil service has already been extended to libraries, and endeavor to organize library civil service or provide for the certification of librarians in the numerous states in which there has been no standardization of the service either by civil service or library authorities.

THE STATE AS A UNIT FOR LIBRARY EXTENSION

By MINNIE W. LEATHERMAN, *Secretary North Carolina Library Commission*

While I believe firmly that state supervision, state direction, and state encouragement are absolutely essential, I do not think that state centralization precludes other forms or lesser units for library extension. Hence, I certainly am not ad-

vocating the state as the best and only unit for library extension, but as the greater unit which includes and necessitates the county, the township, or the district, as the case may be.

It cannot be claimed that library com-